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THE WASHINGTON POST
11 November 1982

Passed Soviets Secrets **Briton Prime Convicted as Spy**

By Peter Osnos
Washington Post Foreign Service

LONDON, Nov. 10—Geoffrey Arthur Prime, a long-time Russian-language specialist for British intelligence, pleaded guilty today to passing secrets to the Soviets that did "exceptionally grave damage" to Britain and its allies over 15 years.

Sentencing Prime to a total of 38 years in prison, Britain's chief justice, Lord Lane, called him a "ruthless, rationally motivated spy." In his work for Britain's main electronic intelligence agency, Prime gained access to matters of "the very highest secrecy," the prosecution said, and provided the Soviets with vast quantities of information.

While details of what Prime gave the Soviets were not disclosed in open court, the description of his activities today appeared to confirm estimates by American officials that the Prime case represents one of the most serious Soviet penetrations of Western intelligence since World War II. For nine years ending in 1977, Prime was deeply involved in signals intelligence—the interception of Soviet communications by Britain and the United States.

Prime, a gaunt, disheveled 44-year-old man, listened grimly as Attorney General Sir Michael Havers presented the evidence against him and flinched as the sentence was

read. He wept softly when his wife, Rhona, who first told police of his espionage, testified that he is now "totally repentant and remorseful."

A 30-page confession given by Prime to police, along with what the state called "the indispensable tools of a modern spy" found in his home, formed the basis of the prosecution. The statement discloses that Prime first contacted the Soviets while stationed with the Royal Air Force in West Berlin in 1968 because he felt "sympathy" for the Soviet regime.

Following that approach, he was twice given security clearance by British intelligence, although he traveled to East Berlin for Soviet spy training and met repeatedly with Soviet agents in Vienna while rising through the ranks of the government's Joint Technical Language Service. The statement said his last contact with the Soviets was in Potsdam, East Germany, in 1981.

Prime's espionage was finally uncovered only after he confessed to his wife last April when police questioned him in connection with sexual attacks on three young girls. He had been identified in a routine check of cars seen in the area. Prime also pleaded guilty to those offenses today. The court was shown a box of 2,287 index cards Prime kept on the contacts he made, mainly by telephone, with potential sex victims.

The failure to detect Prime's spying, despite his behavior and movements over so long a period, has aroused expressions of angry dismay from British politicians about security procedures in intelligence agencies. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher will make a full statement on the case to Parliament on Thursday, expected to focus on the security question.

The prosecution today specifically denied American press reports that Prime had identified the location of nuclear warheads or endangered the lives of Western agents. The Washington Post, quoting intelligence sources, reported on Oct. 25 that he had done so. In its Thursday editions, The Guardian reports that officials at Cheltenham "need to know the day-by-day location of all NATO forces" and the identity of intelligence agents in the Soviet Bloc in order to issue instructions in times of crisis. The newspaper does not say Prime gave that information to the Soviets.

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